

June 2015

## Preparing Culturally Responsive Pre-service Teachers for Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Rose G. Skepple  
*Eastern Kentucky University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/kjectl>

---

### Recommended Citation

Skepple, Rose G. (2015) "Preparing Culturally Responsive Pre-service Teachers for Culturally Diverse Classrooms," *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning*: Vol. 12 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/kjectl/vol12/iss2014/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning by an authorized editor of Encompass. For more information, please contact [Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu](mailto:Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu).

## Preparing Culturally Responsive Pre-service Teachers for Culturally Diverse Classrooms *RESEARCH*

Rose G. Skepple, Eastern Kentucky University

### Abstract

Higher education is currently faced with three realities: (1) students of color comprise almost half of the public school population; (2) the number of teachers of color has not risen in proportion with students of color; (3) the demographic makeup of the teaching force is predominantly White. In response, the author used a phenomenology, qualitative research design to answer the following questions: What personal factors influence pre-service teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base? What cultural diversity learning experiences are in place to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? How do pre-service teachers perceive their professional preparedness to implement culturally responsive teaching practices in a diverse classroom? The first phase of the study involved the collection of demographic background characteristics to examine personal factors that may influence pre-service (N=82) teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base. In Phase 2, the author conducted a follow-up focus group interview with a sub-sample selected from Phase 1. Analyzing the interview revealed disparities among pre-service teachers regarding the aspects of culturally responsive teaching knowledge and implementation. The article concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the results.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive teaching, pre-service teachers, sociocultural consciousness, teacher education programs, culturally diverse classrooms

### Introduction

Anyone who walks into a public school today will find that teachers are not nearly as diverse as their students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), there are approximately 3.1 million teachers in American public elementary and secondary schools. Of those teachers, 82 percent are White, while teachers of color comprise only 17 percent of the teaching profession. At the same time, student diversity has become gradually more apparent in America's public schools. According to national data reported by NCEES (2014) in *The Condition of Education*, the percentage of all public school students from ethnic minority groups increased from 40 percent in 2001 to 48 percent in 2011. In 2011, Hispanic students represented 24 percent of public school enrollment, up seven percent from 2001. During the same time period, African-American student enrollment continued to fluctuate between 16 and 17 percent. In addition, the percentage of English language learners (ELL) in public

schools increased between 2002-2003 (increase of 8.7 percent) and 2011-2012 (9.1 percent). In contrast, White students dropped from 60 to 52 percent in terms of the overall student population. According to NCEES projections, students of color (i.e., Black, Hispanic and Asian) will constitute the statistical majority of public school enrollment by 2035 and account for 57% by 2050. As a result of this increasing diversity, ethnic and racial minority groups will become the "new majority" by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, teachers do not appear to be diversifying at the same rate. Consequently, the cultural mismatch between students' increasing diversity and teachers' backgrounds and perspectives could significantly impact student achievement (Au, 1993).

As the United States becomes increasingly culturally varied, teacher education programs have a growing responsibility to prepare teachers for working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. This reality implies a need for teacher education programs to

alter the prevailing ethos of the traditional program model and consider a new paradigm for teacher training.

The purpose of this study is to examine what personal and professional factors influence prospective teachers' knowledge and skills with regard to culturally responsive teaching, and specifically with implementing these practices in a culturally diverse classroom. Thus, there are several questions driving this research: What personal factors influence pre-service teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base? What cultural diversity learning experiences are in place to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? How do pre-service teachers perceive their professional preparedness to implement culturally responsive teaching practices in a diverse classroom? Answers to the above questions will add to the current research and body of literature related to the impact that culturally responsive teachers have on the performance of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations.

In this article, a case is made for preparing pre-service teachers to teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners through a culturally responsive teaching framework. The components of this teaching approach are based on the research findings, theoretical claims, and practical experiences of Gay (2002), Ladson-Billings (2001), Villegas and Lucas (2002) and others who have focused their attention on developing culturally responsive teachers.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Defining Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Within the last three decades, a group of scholars and researchers have become concerned about the serious academic achievement gap among low-income students and students of color (Au &

Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1990). For more than a decade, these scholars have examined ways that teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools. Various scholars have constructed theoretical underpinnings for culturally relevant teaching, also called culturally responsive teaching. The term culturally responsive teaching will be used in this article and the theoretical underpinnings will be described in the next section.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, interest in culturally responsive teaching grew as a result of concern over the lack of success experienced by many ethnic/racial minority students despite years of education reform. In response to the disproportionate representation of low academic achievement among minority students, Gay (2002) proposed culturally responsive teaching, which is defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more personally meaningful, with the hope of improving academic achievement for ethnically diverse students. This method teaches to and through the strengths of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Gay (2002) asserts that culturally responsive teaching uses "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). This sociocultural theory of teaching, based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, provides instructional scaffolding that encourages students to learn by building on the experiences, knowledge, and skills they bring to the classroom. To do this effectively, teachers need to be open to learning about the cultural particularities of the ethnic groups within their classrooms

and transform that sensitivity into effective classroom practice (McIntyre, Rosebery, & González, 2001). Gay (2002, p. 107) further acknowledged:

Too many teachers and teacher educators think that their subject (particularly math and science) and cultural diversity are incompatible, or that combining them is too much of a conceptual and substantive stretch for their subject to maintain disciplinary integrity. This is simply not true. There is a place for cultural diversity in every subject taught in schools.

Culturally relevant teaching is a term coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) to describe a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. She argues that it urges collective action grounded in cultural understandings, experiences, and ways of knowing the world. In a later work, Ladson-Billings (1994) identified three components of culturally relevant teaching: (a) the teachers' conceptions of themselves and others, (b) the manner in which classroom social interactions are structured, and (c) teachers' conceptions of knowledge. Specifically addressing the needs of African American students, she states that the primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a relevant "Black" personality that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with Africana and African American culture. As this description implies, culturally relevant teachers must be observant and alert to students' classroom behaviors and communications, verbal and nonverbal. Consequently, there is no "one-size-fits all" approach to culturally relevant teaching: Every student must be studied individually and stereotypes about a particular group must be discarded.

Culturally relevant teaching occurs only when teachers are sensitive to cultural differences and when culture is naturally integrated into the curriculum, into instructional and assessment practices, and into classroom management. As a result, culturally responsive teaching is based on the idea that culture is central to student learning.

The theoretical review above presents what culturally responsive teaching is and how teachers who include this instructional and assessment practice into their classrooms make learning more appropriate and effective for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Some researchers, as discussed in the following section, have suggested frameworks for developing culturally responsive teachers.

### **Developing Culturally Responsive Pre-service Teachers**

The majority of teacher candidates who enter certification programs have little knowledge about diverse groups in the United States (Melnick & Zeichner, 1997). Overall, teacher candidates and beginning teachers know little about the histories and cultures of culturally diverse populations. Thus, in preparing teacher candidates to effectively teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, teacher education programs should (1) transform pre-service teacher candidates' multicultural attitudes, (2) increase their culturally diverse knowledge base, and (3) equip them with the skills needed to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Gay, 2010; Hilliard, 1998; Leavell, Cowart, & Wilhelm, 1999).

Researchers believe that teacher education programs must assist pre-service teacher candidates to critically examine their beliefs about diversity (Tatto & Coupland, 2003), their expectations about diversity (Gay, 2010) and teaching in diverse

educational settings (Cabello & Burstein, 1995), and their responsiveness to student differences (Phuntsog, 2001). Gay (2010), Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997), and Villegas and Lucas (2002) contend that tomorrow's teachers must develop an affirming attitude towards all students that is underscored by the belief that all students can learn.

Gay (2002) identifies five important areas that need to be addressed when educating culturally responsive pre-service teachers to work effectively with CLD students: (a) develop a culturally diverse knowledge base, (b) design culturally relevant curricula, (c) cultivate a learning community, and (d) encourage effective cross-cultural communications and deliver culturally responsive instruction.

Additionally, Villegas and Lucas (2002), expanding the works of Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2001), identified six traits that are integral to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. The authors describe culturally responsive teachers as those who:

[...] are socio-culturally conscious; are favorably disposed to diversity; see themselves as cultural brokers in educational institutions; understand and embrace constructivist views of knowledge, teaching and learning; know about the lives of their students; and design instruction to draw on students' strengths and addressing their needs. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 121)

According to Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003), counterproductive beliefs held by teachers must be transformed before culturally responsive teaching can be implemented successfully. This is an important step as pre-service teachers begin to develop a culturally diverse knowledge base. Failure to transform counterproductive beliefs may contribute to teachers viewing culturally

diverse differences through the lens of a counter deficit perspective.

If this transformation is to become a reality, university faculty and school districts must partner in professional development efforts by mentoring, supporting and evaluating culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. School administrators and faculty must be willing to develop a coherent culturally responsive curriculum in which teachers:

[...] connect classroom activities to students' cultural and home experiences; modify instruction to maximize student learning; design culturally relevant curricula and instructional activities; and design instruction that is developmentally appropriate and meets students' affective, cognitive, and educational needs. (Gay, 2010, pp. 31-32)

A synthesis of research findings suggests that developing culturally responsive pre-service teachers involves assisting them in using their culturally diverse knowledge base to design culturally relevant curricula and instructional activities (Kunjufu, 2002), and foster culturally compatible learning environments (Brown, 2003). Thus, preparing culturally responsive teachers involves equipping them with the skills necessary for providing diverse students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

### **Research Procedures**

A phenomenology qualitative research design offered the best means of understanding the essence of pre-service teachers' lived experiences during their student teaching placement in an urban school setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). In the first phase of the study, pre-service teachers completed a demographic background questionnaire in

order to delineate personal factors that may influence pre-service teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base. The descriptive data furnished in this phase of the study were used to guide the purposeful sampling of participants for Phase 2. In the second phase, a focus group interview was conducted to identify the types of culturally responsive experiences that pre-service teachers encountered during their student teaching (diverse classroom) and the perceived influence these experiences had on their perception of their professional preparedness to teach CLD learners.

**Sampling.** In the first phase, the participants for this study consisted of 82 elementary pre-service teacher candidates enrolled in two professional education courses: a science, math, language arts and social studies methods block course and student teaching, consecutively. In the second phase of the study, a purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009) of elementary pre-service teacher candidates was selected to participate in the focus group. Of the original 82 elementary pre-service teacher candidates that attended the diversity workshops, eight (seven females and one male) met the following criteria: (a) completed the pre- and post- survey (b) had good academic standing, (c) was a student teacher in an urban educational setting, (d) was teaching culturally diverse students, and (e) was willing to participate in a follow-up focus group.

**Research Site.** The study was conducted at a state regional university located in South Central Kentucky. During the time of the study, the university enrolled 13,991 undergraduates and 2,277 graduates for a total of 16,268 students. For this study, the focus was on undergraduate students. The undergraduate enrollment by gender was 42.8 percent men and 57.2 percent women. The total ethnicity makeup was 89.8 percent White, non-Hispanic; 5.3 percent

Black, non-Hispanic; 1.1 percent Hispanic; 1.2 percent Asian or Pacific Islander; 0.3 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native; 1.7 percent Race-Ethnicity Unknown; and 0.6 percent Non-Resident Alien. The ethnicity makeup of the rural town where the university is located is 93 percent White (including Hispanic), 5.96 percent African American, 1.1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.7 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.6 percent Other.

**Data Collection Procedures.** The qualitative data collected in the first phase were used to identify participants for the second phase of the study. After receiving their consent in phase 1, participants were asked whether they would be interested in participating in a group interview. According to Fontana and Frey (2000), "The group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting" (p. 651). All participants (n=82) indicating a willingness to participate in the study were given a questionnaire packet. Inside the packet was the demographic background questionnaire and the Culturally Responsive Teaching Preparedness Scale survey (Author, 2011).

The demographic background questionnaire was intended to examine the personal factors that may influence the teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base. The demographic background questionnaire posed 24 multiple choice questions covering the participants' gender, ethnicity, community locale, family composition, income status, school district's ethnic makeup, and their university's racial composition (Author, 2011). These variables have been identified in the research literature as factors that may influence participants' cultural diversity knowledge base.

The CRTPS survey included an open-response question to ascertain pre-service teachers' cultural diversity learning experiences during their teacher education program. Pre-service teachers were asked to complete the open-response question prior to methods and again after their student teaching placement. In sum, this data from Phase 1 was used to answer the first and second research questions guiding this study.

With Phase 1 complete, the researcher performed a purposive sampling (Creswell, 2009) of the teacher candidates in order to obtain participants for Phase 2's focus group interview. Of the original 82 elementary pre-service teachers who attended the diversity workshops, eight (seven females and one male) met the following criteria: (a) completed the pre- and post-survey (b) had good academic standing, (c) was a student teacher in an urban educational setting, (d) was currently teaching culturally diverse students, and (e) was willing to participate in a follow-up focus group. Prior to the focus group session, the researcher met with the facilitator to go over the semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol was given and discussed with the facilitator prior to the group interview (see Appendix). The facilitator was given a brief description of the purpose of the study, the methodology, and expectations. The three main themes of the focus group interview protocol instrument were: (a) pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions concerning their professional preparedness to teach culturally diverse students before student teaching; (b) pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions concerning their professional preparedness to teach in an urban educational setting after student teaching; and (c) are there any personal/professional factors that positively or negatively impact pre-service teacher candidates' confidence

level in teaching culturally diverse students? The focus group was videotaped with the facilitator guiding the questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The participants took approximately 90 minutes to complete the focus group interview. It was then transcribed, analyzed and coded for the purpose of uncovering common themes and sub-themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

In Phase 1, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic background questionnaires. The researcher used the Cycle of Diversity Appreciation holistic model (Thompson & Cuseo, 2009) to analyze participants' cultural diversity experiences during their teacher education program. In Phase 2, following transcription and axial coding, the focus group interview was analyzed for common themes and sub-themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Trustworthiness of the Data.** The researcher used several methods to increase "trustworthiness" and minimize the common threats to validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Trustworthiness of the data depends on providing credibility by following the necessary procedures for data collection and analysis (Mertens, 1998). To this end, the researcher employed data triangulation to establish and strengthen the study's validity (Patton, 2002). In addition, the researcher studied the phenomenon of interest using multiple methods, such as reviewing official documents, including the NCATE Institutional Report, and collecting syllabi. The researcher combined the data from all of these sources to support the findings. Because this study's findings are derived from a single university with predominantly White pre-service teacher candidates and teacher educators, they may not be generalizable to all teacher education programs.

### Findings

The study involved the collection and analysis of qualitative data in order to answer the three research questions underlying this study. Several important themes emerged from the data analysis. First, the participants recognized that limited exposure to diversity may influence their cultural diversity knowledge base and thus their ability to teach CLD learners. Exposure to cultural diversity learning experiences does, in fact, impact pre-service teacher candidates' self-efficacy in teaching CLD learners. My data has revealed that one teacher education program's CRT framework influenced pre-service teacher candidates' perception of their professional preparedness to teach in a diverse classroom. The following section summarizes these qualitative findings.

#### Pre-service Teachers' Cultural Diversity Knowledge Base

Research emphasizes that one's exposure to diverse people is a significant indicator of said person's overall attitudes toward diverse students in school settings (Powell, Sobel, & Hess, 2001). The findings from the demographic background questionnaire provided a glimpse of the personal factors that may influence pre-service teachers' cultural diversity knowledge base and thus affect their ability to teach diverse student populations. As shown in Table 1, 98 percent of pre-service teachers indicated that they were White, non-Hispanic. In terms of hometown, 53.7 percent of the teachers came from a rural locale; 36.6 percent came from a suburban locale, and 9.8 percent came from an urban locale. When asked if their community was ethnically diverse, 73.2 percent said no and 26.8 percent said yes. When asked if the high school they attended was considered ethnically diverse, 89 percent said no and 11 percent said yes. When asked if the teaching

staff of their high school was considered ethnically diverse, 89 percent said no and 11 percent said yes.

The demographic background questionnaire revealed that, prior to attending college, none of them ever had to think deeply about CLD populations. What does this mean for teacher education programs whose mission is to prepare teachers for diverse classrooms? As Howard (1999) appropriately stated, "We can't teach what we don't know," referring to both our knowledge of subject matter and student populations. The growing disparity between the racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of teachers and students is enough to suggest that teacher education programs ought to consider implementing a culturally responsive theoretical perspective framework.

#### Pre-service Teachers' Cultural Diversity Learning Experiences

The following section describes the types of cultural diversity learning experiences that pre-service teachers encountered during their teacher education program and the perceived influence of said experiences on their ability to teach CLD learners.

The Culturally Responsive Teaching Preparedness Scale included a comment section to ascertain pre-service teachers' perceptions of their cultural diversity learning experiences during their teacher education program. This study revealed that most of the candidates were only aware of diversity at first, but they gradually moved toward acceptance after they received diversity interventions during their student teaching experiences.

**Diversity Awareness.** Several pre-service teachers acknowledged that they were given the opportunity to participate in a math and science outreach day at a rural and urban school setting where they

interacted with diverse student populations (e.g., of different races, ethnicities and socioeconomic standings). According to participants, cultural diversity learning experiences were limited to classroom discussions, article critiques (e.g., special needs, race and low socio-economic status), and minimal diverse field experiences. One candidate mentioned, "In most cases, we would end up having class discussions about our own cultural norms... because we have few diverse students in our program." Another student commented,

I think our teacher education program did a great job preparing us to work with students that are White and Black from various socioeconomic classes, but my problem with that is that we will be working with multiple races not just two.

Views about teaching and learning in today's classrooms have changed in the wake of student demographic shifts in public education. Many of the participants' comments expressed a desire to develop their culturally responsive teaching knowledge base to reflect their students' diversity. The pre-service teachers' level of diversity awareness can be summed up in Gay's (2010) assertion that "even without being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave" (p. 9).

**Diversity Acceptance.** Most of the pre-service teachers reported that the diversity seminars provided them with resources and skills that can help them work with diverse populations. One teacher candidate spoke candidly and said:

Honestly, I feel better prepared to go out to teach diverse populations because of the diversity seminars. I don't understand why we don't have a multicultural class to introduce us to culturally responsive teaching and incorporate that knowledge and

information into the rest of our classes in the program.

Many candidates acknowledged their limited cultural diversity learning experiences prior to methods. One student asserted,

I feel that the topic of diversity has been discussed, but I feel that more needs to be done to prepare students for the diversity they will find in the public education classroom. During methods course I only had to write an essay about diversity. This was NOT enough to prepare me for the real-life classroom experiences.

Candidates' comments regarding their diversity learning experiences were limited to facts about culturally diverse populations as opposed to procedural and conditional knowledge related to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. After receiving culturally responsive teaching professional development (during student teaching), candidates became aware that a discussion of culturally responsive teaching with an emphasis on procedural and conditional knowledge would result in useful information for when they enter a diverse classroom. One student summed up the importance of diversity-forming experiences this way:

I feel the diversity seminars helped me be aware of the wide spectrum of students I might encounter as a teacher...I think the teacher education program needs to incorporate more diversity in the program by making students do observations in urban settings where we will experience the most diversity.

### **Preparing Culturally Responsive Pre-service Teachers**

The focus group conducted in the second phase of this study was designed to answer the following question: How do pre-service teachers' perceive their professional

preparedness to implement culturally responsive teaching practices in a diverse classroom? The interview uncovered reasons why pre-service teachers in this study were less self-efficacious in their abilities to work with diverse learners. The following questions from the interview were most significant for addressing this inquiry:

1. How prepared did you feel teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students during your methods placement?
2. How prepared did you feel teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students during your student teaching placement?
3. How prepared did the teacher education program prepare you to teach culturally and linguistically diverse student learners?

In response to the first question, six of the eight participants expressed that they learned how to differentiate instruction in small groups, but lacked opportunities to teach diverse groups prior to methods. Four of the participants felt that the math and science fun day helped somewhat to prepare them to teach culturally diverse students. Another student expounded on the previous comment by saying,

It wasn't the same as the diverse students I saw during student teaching. I feel like we should have some more interactions with maybe some more schools, maybe more observations in diverse schools before being just kind of let loose to go out and teach.

Another student nervously stated,

I didn't feel comfortable because I wasn't exposed to diverse populations before methods. I come from a family of teachers, but then again they all taught at schools in the rural Southeast and it's not very diverse. A lot of my observations didn't take place in a diverse school so I wasn't comfortable.

In response to the second question, two students mentioned learning the Harry Wong techniques, but realized they didn't have a plan B. Another student agreed and when asked to explain, said, "I read the books, we knew how we were supposed to do it. I observed at my second placement during my first placement and I went home and thought I just couldn't do it because it was overwhelming." When asked why the second placement would be difficult, the student replied,

Because they were just different than any class I've been in my life. In this class, it was just hard to get them all to listen and be quiet at one time. It was frustrating to teach them because they were just... wild.

Another student mentioned,

In class we were given the knowledge to teach diverse students and things we needed to do to accommodate different situations. Actually having the ability to teach and getting the opportunity didn't happen until I was actually placed in my first placement.

Many pre-service teachers relied on their previous experiences and culture to shape their view of the world without recognizing the lived experiences of marginalized people. For instance, one candidate stated that she was unable to see institutional discrimination and instead relied on her belief in meritocracy to explain inequities. Although her social class was evident, having grown up in the most rural part of the Southeast, she was unable to apply the same level of consciousness to race.

Finally, in the response to the third question, one student reflected on her level of preparedness and related it to her first placement experiences:

One of the things I remember thinking during my first placement was why we didn't get more in-class experience during classroom management and

more culturally responsive teaching skills... like knowing how to teach that in classroom management. In class we did whole group lessons and tons of small-group activities, but not a lot of real-life experiences.

During the focus group, participants reported that classroom management was a major concern. They believed their classroom management preparation provided theory without real-life practices. That is, few participants felt that they were prepared to effectively teach and meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of their culturally diverse classrooms. All the participants acknowledged that this topic (culturally responsive teaching) was one that they had definitely thought about on more than one occasion. When asked to recommend how the teacher education should prepare culturally responsive teachers, one student shared, “from the beginning of the program pre-service teachers should observe culturally diverse populations and teach small groups in their classroom settings.” Another student stated, “all student teachers should be required to complete an entire year of student teaching in two different placements: both rural and urban settings.”

The focus group interview revealed that pre-service teachers were more confident in their knowledge of differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching practices for CLD students and less confident in their ability to translate that knowledge into a diverse classroom setting. The focus group interview with the eight pre-service teachers resulted in a candid discussion that was helpful in understanding their sociocultural consciousness beliefs.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study focused on identifying the types of culturally responsive teaching

practices conducted in a South Central Kentucky teacher education program and the perceived influence that these practices have on pre-service teachers’ sense of preparedness to teach in an urban school setting. The findings from this study support Villegas and Lucas’ (2002) call to expand future teachers’ level of sociocultural consciousness. By focusing on sociocultural consciousness, the study shows that pre-service teachers’ ways of thinking, behaving and being may be influenced by their culturally diverse knowledge base (race, ethnicity, social class, and language). The researcher proposes that these inadequacies can be modified by teacher educators expanding their curriculum to include a conceptual framework that weaves practices of culturally responsive teaching across disciplines. Finally, this study is significant for teacher educators who are preparing future teachers to be competent and confident in their ability to implement practices of culturally responsive teaching. The practical implications for teacher educators may include modifying their curricula to include sociocultural consciousness awareness, modeling culturally responsive pedagogical skills, increasing dialogue among pre-service teachers on diversity topics, and exposing teacher candidates to diverse students, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators throughout the teacher education program.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study are important, especially as many future pre-service and in-service teachers will likely teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; however, several limitations should be considered. First, the participants from the study only reflect the sociocultural consciousness beliefs of White, non-Hispanic pre-service

teachers in the Southeast. Therefore, these findings may not generalize well to other cultures and linguistically diverse populations within the United States or internationally. Second, participants were taken from a purposeful sample population who were willing to be interviewed in a semi-structured focus group setting. Consequently, it is unknown if the qualitative findings would be different had

those who did not meet the criteria participated in the second phase of the study. Third, the study stops short of examining teacher educators' curricula for coursework and field experiences that are relevant to culturally responsive teaching. This method of data analysis provided notable findings, but should nevertheless be considered a limitation.

**Table 1**  
*Summary of Demographic Background Characteristics as a Percentage*

Variable	Phase 1 participants (n=82)
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	97.6
Black, non-Hispanic	1.2
Other	1.2
Gender	
Female	90.2
Male	9.8
Languages Spoken in Home	
One	96.3
Two	3.7
Community Locale	
Rural	53.7
Urban	9.8
Suburban	36.6
Diverse Community	
Yes	24.4
No	75.6
Diverse High School Population	
Yes	26.8
No	73.2
Diverse High School Staff	
Yes	11.0
No	89.0

## References

## Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning

- Au, K. H. (1993). *Literacy instruction in multicultural settings*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Au, K. H., & Kawakami, A. J. (1994). Cultural congruence in instruction. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations* (pp. 5-24). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Brown, R. (2003). *It's your fault: An insider's guide to learning and teaching in city schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Cabello, B., & Burstein, N. (1995). Examining teachers' beliefs about teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4), 285-294.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 645-672). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- . (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.
- . (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gilmore-Skepple, R. (2011). *Developing culturally responsive preservice teachers: Implications for teacher education programs* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3454855)
- Hilliard, A. G. (1998). *SBA: The reawakening of the African mind*. Gainesville, FL: Makare Publishing.
- Howard, G. R. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kunjufu, J. (2002). *Black students. Middle class teachers*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1990). Like lightning in a bottle: Attempting to capture the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of Black students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 3(4), 335-344. doi:10.1080/0951839900030403
- . (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(4), 312-320.
- , G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers for African-American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- , G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leavell, A. G., Cowart, M., & Wilhelm, R. W. (1999). Strategies for preparing culturally responsive teachers. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 32(1), 64-71.
- McIntyre, E., Rosebery, A., & González, N. (Eds.) (2001). *Classroom diversity: Connecting curriculum to students' lives*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Melnick, S. L., & Zeichner, K. M. (1997). Enhancing the capacity of teacher education institutions to address diversity issues. In J. E. King, E. R. Hollins, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for cultural diversity* (pp. 23-29). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2014, April). *The condition of education*. Retrieved June 3, 2014 from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_clr.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clr.asp)
- Phuntsog, N. (1999). The magic of culturally responsive pedagogy: In search of the genie's lamp in multicultural education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 26(3), 97-111.
- Powell, R. R., Sobel, D., & Hess, R. S. (2001). The relationship between situated cognition and rural preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding diversity. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 17(2), 71-83.
- Shade, B., Kelly, C., & Oberg, M. (1997). *Creating culturally responsive classrooms*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Tatto, M. T., & Coupland, D. B. (2003). Teacher education and teachers' beliefs: Theoretical and measurement concerns. In J. Rath, & A. C. McAninch (Eds.), *Advances in teacher education series*, 6 (pp. 123-181). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Thompson, A., & Cuseo, J. B. (2009). *Diversity & The College Experience*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Villegas, A. M. (1991). *Culturally responsive pedagogy for the 1990's and beyond*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.
- Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Weinstein, C., Curran, M., & Tomlinson-Clarke, S. (2003). Culturally responsive classroom management: Awareness into action. *Theory into Practice*, 42(4), 269-276.

| Rose G. Skepple is Assistant Professor, Eastern Kentucky University. |